

**COUNCILLOR PETRINA LEES
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND HEALTH
FULL COUNCIL REPORT, JULY 2020**

Housing Management:

Following new government guidance, viewings and lettings of council properties have now recommenced. The loss of rent due to properties remaining vacant during lockdown amounted to £58k which will have an ongoing effect on the Housing Revenue Account.

Welfare checks of vulnerable tenants are continuing and where necessary referrals are made for support services to be linked in.

There has been an increase in rent arrears during the period of lockdown. Those tenants in rent arrears are contacted to check upon their welfare and see if they require any welfare benefits advice or debt counselling or even whether they require a food parcel via the food bank. Tenants who are newly on Universal Credit are also being contacted to see if they require any advice or assistance especially as a number of these are first time claimants of Universal Credit. Officers have resumed initial rent arrears actions with tenants who are not engaging as there currently 53 rent accounts where the arrears have increased by £1,000.00+ and 104 by £500.00 - £999.99, between 15 March 2020 and 21 June 2020. Actions may at some stage involve serving Notice To Quits (NTQs) however all court action currently remains suspended.

Sheltered Housing:

Residents in sheltered accommodation are continuing to be supported. Tenants are receiving daily welfare checks and if needed are receiving help with shopping and collection of prescriptions.

All 730 lifeline users have also been contacted to check on their welfare and have also been reminded to be vigilant regarding potential bogus callers.

Homelessness:

The homelessness service remains busy and all of the Council's specialist temporary units are currently occupied. It has therefore been necessary to use hotels to accommodate people presenting as homeless.

The Housing Options Team have dealt with 104 homeless approaches, during working hours and out of hours since lockdown began and are currently managing 58 homeless applications, with 22 people placed in temporary accommodation.

Development:

Members and Officers have been working on developing a new 3 year Development Programme with an objective of achieving 200 properties over this period. Opportunities have been identified to source and deliver new housing. Each scheme identified will be assessed for

viability and the Council's HRA Business Plan will be updated by the end of December 2020 to include the construction costs and revenue resulting from this new housing.

The Government are offering a temporary relaxation on RTB 1-4-1 expenditure in response to Covid-19. They are allowing authorities up until the end of quarter 3 (31st December 2020) to catch up with expenditure. The Council has signed up to this temporary relaxation however in the meantime officers are making a case to MHCLG to further increase the time in which the RTB receipt has to be repaid as it is unlikely that there is the capacity to catch up by the end of December.

Private Sector Housing

There has been a reduction in Private Sector Housing complaint work during the lockdown period. Likewise demand for Disabled Facilities Grants has reduced, however referrals from Adult Social Care are now coming through again.

Health and Wellbeing

The Environmental Health Service will be providing 7 day week cover to support the Essex Test and Trace Service. This work will be vital to tackle outbreaks of Covid-19 that may occur within the district. Officers will be tasked to work alongside ECC Health Protection Teams to investigate outbreaks within workplace settings.

Tasks include the following:

- Attend the workplace to check on compliance with Covid-19 workplace setting guidelines
- Carry out a risk assessment to identify the number of employees that may have been infected
- Establish contacts who may have been in contact with infected persons
- Provide advice on further control measures within the workplace